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SUBJECT: Following up the President's al-Arabiya Interview - Turkish Media Praise Message of Unity with Muslims

REF: STATE 7500

¶11. Summary: Turkish media coverage of President Obama's al-Arabiya interview last week was overwhelmingly positive. Many news stories focused on his statement that "Americans are not the enemies of Muslims" and commentators praised the interview's unifying spirit. The US Mission supported the interview by posting it on our website, composing and releasing a companion "Ask the Ambassador" website blog and using a visit by Ambassador Jeffrey to a prominent Ankara mosque to emphasize the President's commitment to reaching out to the Muslim world. End Summary.

¶12. Turkish media coverage of President Obama's al-Arabiya interview was generally very positive. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, leftist Taraf, liberal Radikal, and Islamist-oriented Zaman all quoted Obama in the same headline, "Americans Are Not The Enemies of Muslims." Mainstream Milliyet headlined an article, "This Is Real Change," as Obama promised "We Are Not the Enemy of Muslims," and he said "Yes to contacts with Iran." Ozdemir Ince wrote in mainstream Hurriyet, "President Obama exemplifies the spirit of Abraham Lincoln by pursuing a unifying tone without discriminating against any ethnic or religious groups in the United States of America. This is just the kind of unifying rhetoric Turkey needs." In a related story, Yeni Safak carries the headline, "Listen to Arabs," and reports, "George Mitchell is embarking on a tour of the Middle East in order to do more listening than talking."

¶13. Embassy Ankara posted the transcript of the Al-Arabiya interview on our website as soon as we received it from EUR/PPD. We then sent text messages to our diplomatic correspondents and bureau chiefs with links to the transcript to ensure that all media outlets had access to the president's comments.

(http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statement_012609.html)

¶14. In addition, the day after the Al-Arabiya interview, Embassy Ankara posted a new Ask the Ambassador Q and A based on the talking points distributed in the reftel. We also sent text message announcements on this website information to our diplomatic correspondents and our bureau chiefs. The new Q&A is available at http://turkey.usembassy.gov/ask_the_ambassador_qa.html (English) and http://turkish.turkey.usembassy.gov/soru_cevap.html (Turkish).

¶15. A few days later, Ambassador Jeffrey used a previously scheduled courtesy call on the imam of Ankara's prominent Maltepe mosque to reiterate the President's commitment to reach out to the Muslim world. Following evening prayers, the Iman announced Amb. Jeffrey's presence at the mosque to those present, and a sizeable number thronged to the Ambassador to welcome him. (The mosque's imam, Mustafa Demir, will take part in a USG sponsored exchange program this week.) Demir later spoke to the Turkish press in glowing terms about Ambassador Jeffrey's visit and media reports focused on the Ambassador's reiteration of the President's message to the imam and worshippers at the mosque.

¶16. Comment: From the left to the right, from the secularists to the Islamists, media reacted positively to President Obama's promise, "Americans are not the enemies of Muslims." His message has resonated positively with Turkish media and the Turkish public. There is cautious but real hope here in Turkey that the President's message of dialogue will have help decrease the anti-Americanism that has plagued the relationship in recent years.

JEFFREY